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COMMENT

ON THE

APOSTLES' CREED,

FOR THE USE OF

UNLEARNED CHRISTIANS.

BY THE

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Comment was composed to be preached to a Country Congregation of Protestants, as a Sermon; and the Reader will please to observe, that the Author has published it in its original State.





A
C O M M E N T
ON THE
APOSTLES' CREED.

Christian Brethren,

AS I have thought proper upon this occasion to offer you a comment upon a part of that creed in your common-prayer book, commonly called the Apostles' Creed, it may not perhaps be unacceptable to some of you to know why it has this title of the Apostles' Creed, when it is well known to persons conversant in the history of the church, that it was not written by any of the Apostles. It was a custom to call those churches apostolic churches, in which any Apostle had personally taught, particularly

cularly if he had resided long there. Many such churches had been established in the east, but none but that of Rome in the west; so that in the west, whoever spoke of the apostolic church, was supposed to mean the church of Rome—and thus the bishop of Rome was called the apostolic bishop; the faith of that church the apostolic faith; and the creed used in it, the apostolic creed, now called the Apostles'.

I hope now you may safely believe, that this creed is no more than a confession of faith, drawn up by the church of Rome, as was common in all the most eminent churches of that time; and that consequently it is a mere human composition, which you may admit or reject as you find it can, or cannot be proved by holy scripture. I am afraid it may prejudice you against this creed, when you are told, that it originated with the bishop of Rome, now known by the name of the pope of Rome; and if it be fairly and impartially examined
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by the divine standard of truth, as found in the gospel, some errors, I am persuaded, will be detected. These errors, which are most of them additions to the original creed, and introduced to countenance religious party-disputes at the time, I shall take the liberty to correct or reject, and give you my reasons for this as I read it; and that you may compare it, with these alterations, to that in your common-prayer book, it will not be improper to turn to it.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived ~~by~~ *of* the Holy Ghost, (*Spirit* I read it; for the word Ghost is not used now in such a sense as it is in this creed); born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into ~~hell,~~ (*he descended into hell* I leave out, because it was not in the creed till 400 years after Christ); the third day he rose again from the dead, (I

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read it, he *was raised* again from the dead; because his resurrection, in the New Testament, is constantly ascribed to the Father); he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right-hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the *quick* and the dead, (the *living* and the dead; because quick does not signify *living* in our language at present; though, as opposed here to *dead*, you may probably understand it in that sense). I believe in the Holy Spirit, (as before) the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, (I omit these words—*the holy catholic church, the communion of saints*; because *catholic* was added 300 years after Christ, and the *communion of saints* some hundred years later). Now, if these three last-mentioned articles of the creed—which I have briefly given you my reasons for rejecting—had been as ancient as the rest, they are so obscure, and so undeterminate in their meaning, that they should not be admitted into a solemn

solemn declaration of our faith before Almighty God. I make no alteration in the following articles of the creed; and shall now proceed to examine whether, without the articles which I have rejected, it be founded upon the genuine and original doctrine of scripture.

I believe in God—Belief is an assent of the mind to a matter proposed to it, upon sufficient testimony, whether that testimony be divine or human: But in this creed it may properly enough be considered in a more extensive sense, as expressing our belief in the existence and attributes of God; that is, we profess to believe that there is one God, and but one God, over or above all. Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts, I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. (Isa. xlv. 6). I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God besides me. (Isa. xlv. 5). He is the creator, the first cause of all things, who
constantly

constantly supports and protects every created being; so that we, his rational creatures, are strictly obliged to worship him for all his blessings bestowed upon us, and him only, as no other being has, nor can have, any share in the original donation of these blessings. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (Matt. iv. 10). But this one God, this highest and only Independent Being, is likewise stiled, in this creed, *the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth*, in a very endearing manner, as having brought us into being, as providing us with all things necessary in this life, and promising us, upon our obedience, that, in a future life, as his children, we shall be heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. (Rom. viii. 7). I am persuaded you will require no proof, that the Father is almighty, and the maker of heaven and earth; but as some learned christians believe that the Supreme Being made use of Je-
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fus Christ as his instrument in making the worlds, I shall but just observe, that if this opinion be true, we may still justly profess and believe, that God is the maker of heaven and earth: For if Jesus Christ were the instrumental maker of the worlds, as a created being himself, he could have no power to perform this but what was given him by the Father; and thus the Father, according to a figure of speech common in both sacred and profane authors, may be said to do it himself. I will mention but one example of this manner of expression, which is familiar to you all: In the fourteenth chapter of his gospel, Matthew says, that Herod sent, and beheaded John in the prison; *i. e.* sent a person with a warrant, power, or authority, from him, to behead John. This is evident, from Mark's account of the same transaction: And immediately the king (*i. e.* Herod) sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought; and he (*i. e.* the executioner)

tioner) went, and beheaded him in the prison.

And (I believe) in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. Our Saviour is here represented, by his name, *Jesus Christ*; by his peculiar character, as *the only Son of God*; and by his dominion, as *our Lord*. *Jesus* is his proper name, and signifies *Saviour*; *Christ*, or *Messias*, which signifies *anointed*. In the law, whatever was anointed was thereby set apart, as ordained to some special use or office; and therefore, by unction or anointing with oil, we must understand consecration, ordination, and other similar ceremonies. The priest that is anointed signifies the high priest, because he was ordained to that office by unction. Moreover, the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, *Thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.* (Exod. xxx. 30). When therefore Jesus is called the *Messias* or

or Christ the Anointed, and that long after anointing with oil had ceased, it signifies that he was a person set apart by God, and advanced to the highest offices, such as before, among the Jews, had been conferred by pouring oil upon the heads of the officers.

And (I believe) in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived of by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he was raised from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right-hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

I put all these articles of the creed together, because I am persuaded that you are so fully convinced of the truth of most of them, from your own perusal of the New Testament, that no particular proof is necessary.

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But as you may perhaps desire further information upon some of them, I shall select those for this purpose, which I think may not be so clearly understood by you as you could wish: The first, I presume, may be, why Jesus Christ is here called the *only* son of God? Now it is very well known by those who have read the scriptures attentively, that all mankind are called sons of God; and the difficulty here, if it be indeed a difficulty, is to ascertain in what sense Jesus Christ is the *only* son of God. He may be so called, because an only child is in general the object of his parents' fondest affection; but as we are assured by the authors of holy scripture, that God is no respecter of persons, why then should Jesus Christ be declared by him, as he was at his baptism at the river Jordan, his *beloved* son, with whom he was well pleased? (Matt. iii. 17). To solve this question, we must have recourse to the opinion of those who, as I mentioned

ed before, suppose that Jesus Christ existed with the Father before the creation, and was that great Celestial Being, by whom he made the worlds, and all creatures they contain; by whom he communicated with Abraham, Moses, and others mentioned in the law and the prophets, under the character of the Jehovah-Angel, or Minister of the covenant; and that, when a great part of mankind had corrupted the true religion, and were sunk into gross ignorance and idolatry, this only or beloved son of God voluntarily offered to be made flesh, to be born of a woman, to *redeem* mankind; that is, to make such a new declaration of the will of God, as, if embraced and practised, would deliver them from the dominion and slavery of sin. On account of this voluntary humiliation, and earnest desire to save sinners, God was pleased to call him his *only* or *beloved* son. This appears to me to be the true scripture doctrine for the reasons of

Christ's *incarnation*, as it is called, or his appearance upon earth in the flesh, or as a man. But I must not omit to inform you, that there is another sense in which Jesus Christ may be with great propriety stiled the *only* son of God; and that is, as he *was conceived by the Holy Spirit*, as is expressed in the following article of this creed: To this purport was the declaration of the angel to the Virgin Mary; the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy offspring shall be called *the son of God*. (Luke i. 35). And as he was conceived in this miraculous manner, without the intervention of any human father; that is, in such a manner as no man was ever conceived before, he may, in this sense, be properly called the *only* son of God. But, as I told you before, I am rather inclined to think, that he is called the *only* son of God, because he voluntarily submitted to become flesh,

flesh, or a man, that he might be the favour of sinful man. That he had employed the great powers bestowed upon him by the Father, in a conscientious discharge of his ministry, under the *Jewish dispensation*, must have been a service well pleasing to that Being who wishes that all his rational creatures may be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. And when he was degraded to a state of human infirmity, but by the powerful assistance of the Holy Spirit enabled to execute the arduous office of minister of the *Christian dispensation*; for his faithful discharge of this important trust, it pleased God to exalt him to greater glory in heaven than he had enjoyed before, and to give him a name which is above every name; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philip. ii. 10). In this passage you will observe that the Apostle lays great stress upon every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ

Lord; and as I forgot to explain this in its proper place, I will just mention its signification now. When in this creed we profess that Jesus Christ is *our Lord*, we profess to believe that we christians are, in this present world, his subjects; and that consequently he is our Lord, King or Governor, whom we ought to hear or obey; and that his kingdom will continue, till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; *i. e.* he must reign till he hath raised all his faithful subjects to life—and thus have destroyed death—and present them to his Father, as meet to be partakers of eternal happiness in his kingdom; then he (Jesus Christ) will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father—that God may be all in all. (i. Cor. 15). In the form of prayer taught us by our Saviour, we pray to God that his *kingdom may come*; by *kingdom* here we understand particularly his kingdom of glory, in which he shall finally be for ever

ever adored by those, who, through a life of virtue and true holiness, shall be found meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; (Coloss. i. 12.) and if we be faithful and obedient subjects of Christ in his kingdom on earth, we shall be joint heirs with him of eternal happiness in his Father's kingdom in heaven. But you will say, perhaps, that this contradicts what Christ says himself—My kingdom is not of this world. But he means by this; my kingdom is not like the kingdoms of the world, a kingdom of pomp and grandeur, and temporal power, but my kingdom is spiritual, and preparatory for my Father's kingdom in heaven.

I hope you now fully understand what we mean when we call Jesus Christ *our Lord*; but perhaps you may wish to know, how he is appointed to *judge the living and the dead*. Both the old and new testaments mention, that Christ should come twice into the world, but in very dif-

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ferent characters; the first time meek and lowly, riding upon an ass; the second, gloriously descending from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; (1 Thess. iv. 16.) in which you will find a very plain and particular account of this second advent. One great reason why the Jews did not allow Jesus to be the Messias or Christ, was, that they mistook this second or glorious advent for the first. Their prejudices would not therefore suffer them to believe that he, who, according to their prophets, was to come in the clouds of heaven, and have dominion and glory, and a kingdom; that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him, (Dan. vii. 13, 14) could be a carpenter's son; one, who was so far from assuming the state and dignity of a king, as described in the prophecy just mentioned, that when, after he had wrought a signal miracle, and he perceived that the spectators would take him by force to make him *a king*, (i. e.

a king in their mistaken sense) he departed into a mountain himself alone. (Joh. vi. 15). Such was the meek and lowly Jesus, while he was our teacher upon earth; and in this character we christians are commanded to imitate him, in humility, submission, and obedience to the will of God. But this person, apparently so humble, will appear—as I have just observed—in a high and exalted station, at his second coming, no less than the *judge of the living and the dead*. This is indeed a great and important office, in which christians are peculiarly interested, and which we cannot reflect upon without awful dread and trembling. The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son, (Joh. v. 22). For God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given an assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (Acts xvii. 31). For to this end
Christ

Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be lord both of the dead and living; (Rom. xiv. 9) or, as it should rather have been translated—for to this end Christ lived and died, and was raised again, that he might be lord both of the dead and living. He is so often represented in scripture in his judicial character, that it is unnecessary to quote all the passages which relate to it. I shall only mention upon this occasion that passage in Matthew, where he is, with great beautiful propriety, represented as exercising this office under the similitude of a shepherd: When he had ordered the unprofitable servant, (*i. e.* the servant who had hid his talent in the earth) to be cast into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, the Evangelist adds; when the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another,

another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. (Matt. xxiv. 30, &c.) And this important office of judge and Lord of the dead and the living is conferred upon him, John says, because he is the son of man, (v. 27) that is, because he voluntarily took our nature upon him, and knows all our weakness and infirmities, as he was tempted in all things like as we are; but executed his ministry with firm and steady obedience to the will of God; and therefore is exalted with great glory to that throne, before which we must all be judged according to our works. You need not be told, that he who is qualified to judge us in this manner, must necessarily be acquainted with all our ways, must know all the secrets of our hearts: He is called in scripture, him who searcheth the heart, who searcheth the reins and hearts. (Rom. viii. 27. Rev. ii. 23). You will recollect several instances recorded in the Gospels, of his being endowed with this power, during his sacred ministry

ministry on earth ; and you will likewise recollect, that a similar power of knowing the thoughts of men, was communicated occasionally, at least, to his Apostles ; as is particularly exemplified in the history of Ananias and Sapphira, in the Acts : And as this power was exercised by Christ upon earth, and he was, after his ascension, invested with greater power, authority and glory, we may certainly conclude, that he is now better qualified for such a high office and prerogative over his redeemed. But you will say, that a being of such great endowments, capable of creating all things, and of searching the hearts of men, must be more than a mere created being, must be a God. This is readily allowed, provided you understand it in that sense, in which Moses and other magistrates and great officers are called gods in scripture, *i. e.* persons vested with particular power and authority—For in this sense, Paul tells us in his first epistle to the Corinthians, there are many that
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are called *gods*, and many that are called *lords*—but he immediately adds; but to us, there is but *one God the Father* (viii. 5, 6).

Take care therefore, that while you ascribe all due honour and glory unto Christ, and are truly thankful for what he did and suffered for your salvation, you do not suppose him to be the *supreme God*. For I trust you may safely consider him as a *God* in no other sense, than as a *creature endowed with great power and authority, by the Father Almighty*—But you will say farther, that I have intimated to you before, that God the Supreme Being made him the creator of all things. This I own, appears to me probable; and I will now give you my sentiments upon this point, more particularly.—You will remember many passages in the Gospels, in which it is affirmed that Christ made many who were maimed—such, for instance, as wanted a hand, arm, or leg—*instantaneously whole,*

whole, or perfect in their members: Now, what is this but creation, or, at least, giving to matter a new form, consistency, and arrangement? A power then of this kind is evidently a power which God Almighty can communicate to a creature. Whether the Supreme Being first created matter, and Christ afterwards, by the power communicated to him, gave it that form and modification which we observe in what is called the world, or all nature, animate and inanimate, I cannot pretend to determine; for I will not presume to be wise above what is written. Moses' account of the creation, in the first chapter of Genesis, is obscure, and difficult to be understood; my opinion in this matter is founded more particularly upon the new testament; and I must not neglect to remind you, that in this part of the bible you will find,—particularly in the epistles—frequent mention of another creation. This means that great spiritual or moral reformation which was effected by the
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the gospel, or the preaching of Christ and his Apostles ; which is, by a bold figure, called *a new creation*—thus, if any be in Christ, he is a new creature, rather a new creation (2 Cor. v. 17). And in Jesus Christ neither circumcision is any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creation, (Gal. vi. 15). Hence those who faithfully embraced and practised the religion of Christ, are said to put on the *new man*. Put off, according to your former conversation (*i. e.* behaviour or conduct, Eph. iv. 22, &c.) the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts ; and be ye renewed in the spirit, (or rather affections) of your mind ; and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.

But if Christ be our creator and judge, even in the qualified sense, which I have explained, you may probably have no objection to praying to him, and worshiping him, as you are taught to do in the Litany, and many other places in your common-

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prayer

prayer book—But though you may find many human authorities for such worship, I am persuaded they are not warranted by the new testament; for however such a practice may seem to be countenanced by the example of Stephen when he was stoned to death, as related in the seventh chapter of the Acts, yet the case is singular; and allowing the word to be properly translated, which, in our testament, is *calling*; yet neither this word in English, nor the word it is made to represent in the original, signify properly either an act of prayer or worship. The word in the original may be rendered *appealing*, *i. e.* appealing from the unjust sentence of the Jews, to the righteous judgment of Christ—But we need not insist upon this single passage; for if christians had been required by God to pay religious worship to Christ, would not Christ or his Apostles have given us such clear and repeated precepts for this, as would have left no doubt or scruple in the case? So far from this, neither

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the precepts of Christ, nor the practice of his Apostles, give the least sanction to such worship. Christ himself prayed, and taught his disciples to pray, to the Father only.—When ye pray, say, Our Father, &c. as in that form of prayer, commonly called the Lord's prayer. (Matt. vi. 9.—Luke xi. 2). But you will say, there are many instances in the Evangelists, which prove that Christ was actually worshiped on earth, and that he did not forbid, or even discountenance, such worship. It must be granted, that, according to our translation, Christ was worshiped; but we are to consider how, and in what sense he was worshiped. To worship, in every instance of this kind, signifies no more than to express by actions a great respect or veneration for a person. Among the eastern nations it was customary for the common people, when they approached a prince, or any person of dignity, to *prostrate* themselves, i. e. *fall down at his feet*, and thus testify their homage or worship of him.

(a) John XVI, 23.^{C 2}

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This custom obtained among the Jews, as we find in various instances in the new testament. The wise men who came from the east, when introduced into the presence of Jesus and his mother Mary, *fell down and worshiped him*; and Cornelius, a Roman centurion, as we are informed in the tenth chapter of the Acts, when he had sent for Peter to hear the word of God, and was told that he was approaching, went to meet him with great haste and zeal, and falling at his feet, worshiped him; (Acts v. 25). and in this sense you must understand this custom of worshiping, or expression of respect and veneration, in all places of the new testament, whether it is performed to Jesus Christ or any other man—When we are commanded to worship God the Father Almighty, the language is very different, as the object of the worship is very different; thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *him only* shalt thou serve.

The next and last article of the
creed

creed which I shall examine, is, *I believe in the holy spirit*. Upon this article I shall not perplex you with the unintelligible jargon of those, who suppose *the holy spirit* to be, what they call, the third person in the trinity, and God, equal to the Father; as I flatter myself you have never found, nor ever will find, any such doctrine in the new testament. By *the holy spirit* then, I understand, that assistance, power, or knowledge which God is pleased to communicate to his prophets and teachers, in order to enable them to make known his will to men, in such a manner as may most effectually convince them of a divine commission from him to reveal to them his will, and teach them the true way to eternal salvation. Christ, before his crucifixion, tells his disciples, that at his request, the Father would send them another comforter, which would abide with them to the end of their ministry; and afterwards informs them that this comforter was the holy spirit, which the

Father

Father would send in his name, *i. e.* on his account, or to promote the object of his mission; and that he would teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance all things which he had said to them. But my opinion upon this article is but the opinion of a weak, fallible person; and as such, an opinion which you will either embrace or reject, as you find it consonant with scripture or not. And give me leave to assure you, from the fullest conviction, and with the utmost sincerity of heart, that neither my opinion of this creed, nor the creed itself, nor any other human confession of faith, is of any importance, or any obligation, if it be not consistent with the form of sound words delivered by Christ and his Apostles. The bible, and the *bible alone*, is, and must be the creed of every christian; search, examine it for yourselves, practise its precepts to the best of your judgment, and I may venture to assure you, *that your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*

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BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning ; grant that we may in such a manner hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

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